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GUIDE TO THE STYLES.—III.

STYLE LOUIS XIV.; OR, LOUIS QUATORZE. PERIOD, 1643-1715.



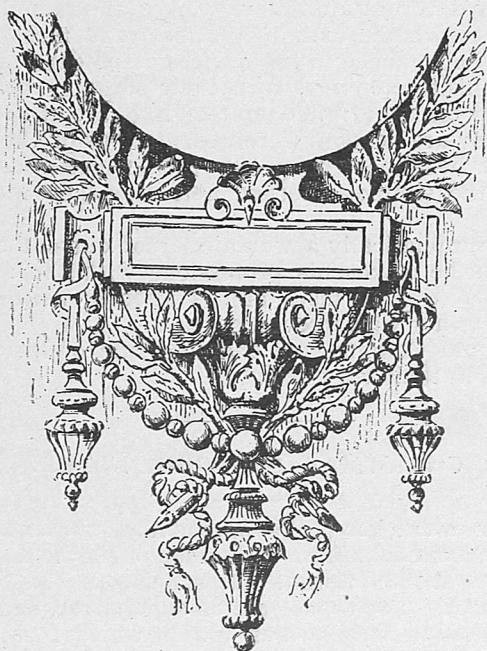
IN THE arts as in letters, the period of Louis XIV. aspired above all things to greatness and majesty.

The court moulded itself to the fancies of the absolute monarch, the town imitated the court, and the country followed the fashions of the town.

All the arts were subjected to the high leadership of the painter Charles Le Brun, while Colbert, the indefatigable minister, endeavored to wrest from foreign nations the industrial supremacy which made France their tributary. The decorative arts had their institute, as it were, their academy, at the Gobelins, the recently-appointed Manufactory of Royal Furniture.

The thought and spirit of Le Brun inspired the designers of ornament, even when the designs were not the creation of this painter himself. Lepautre, and later on Bérain, in general ornamentation; Boulle in cabinet work; Ballin and Delaunay in goldsmith's work, were the most illustrious among the notable names of the period.

We may consider the evolution of the style Louis XIV. as having developed itself in at least two distinct periods: the influence of Lepautre characterized the first, that of Bérain the second. With Bérain, the style



AN EARLY EXAMPLE OF LOUIS XIV. ORNAMENT.

Louis XIV., essentially grand, even to exaggeration and redundancy, took a lighter and freer turn, more delicate and expressive.

The impression which characterizes the style Louis XIV. is one of pomp and greatness. Nothing in it is attenuated or reduced, and the vigor of the details is not impaired by an excess of finish in their execution. The curves are preferably convex.

The geometrical outlines are simple, very often rectangular, solidly posed, and somewhat heavy. The

symmetry of the two sides of the decorative motives is perfect.

The almost universal use of gilt wood must be noted among the distinctive peculiarities of the period. This material continues to be held in special favor until near the wane of the style Louis XV. Brass and shell marquetry, to which the cabinet-maker Boulle gave his name, although he did not invent it, never was so commonly used, and may never again be so much in vogue.



EXAMPLE OF LATER AND BETTER PERIOD OF LOUIS XIV. DECORATION.

The style of this workman-artist being a modification of the style Louis XIV., we should make mention of the half-relief brass figures which he was wont to set in panels, the backgrounds of which were formed by his marquetry.

The characteristic ornamentation of the style Louis XIV. is entirely Roman, as that of the style Louis XVI. is entirely Greek. But the idea which most directly appeals to the spirit of the seventeenth century is that of martial heroism, not the perception of the graces of Nature. The architecture is also Roman, like the decoration. In the former, inverted consoles and large balls are to be found pretty much everywhere flanking the bays or surmounting the corners of the façades. In decoration the most frequent motives are antique trophies, simulating heaps of warlike spoils, in which are gathered together breastplates, plumed helmets, bucklers, swords, fasces, laurel wreaths, clubs, etc., and, of another order, allegorical representations of rivers traversed; winged victories; bulging cartouches, hemispherical, fancifully cut out, and lined with a well-developed hem or border; great cornucopias, generously pouring out their contents; heavy garlands of leaves and fruits; rich scrolls; strongly wrought-out acanthus leaves; and, more or less everywhere, masks, *fleurs-de-lis*, and the double "L" of the King's monogram.

We may also note the flat-sided, sheath-like supports of the furniture and clocks, Saturn or Apollo furnishing decorative subjects for the latter; the apron-like lambrequins, the great fronds of the tissues, the bright, often canary-yellow grounds of the embroideries, the use of stucco and gilt mouldings in the decoration of wainscoting, which are displacing tapestry as a wall-covering; the masks, the diminished size of the chimneys, compared with those of the preceding periods, and the advance of mirrors into more general use.

It was under the reign of Louis Quatorze the French Renaissance obtained its largest proportions and its richest ornamentations, and the seventeenth century has been handed down to posterity as the century of Louis Quatorze, and in art and decoration the denomination of this epoch indicates the last and richest period of the French Renaissance. The doorway we illustrate is a most vigorous study in this style.